

BOOKS.

THE BOURBON OF ANTHROPOLOGY.

In his book on "Our Knowledge of the External World," Mr. Bertrand Russell mentions the traditional unfamiliarity of metaphysicians with exact science, and shows how this unfamiliarity affects their professional philosophizing. Mr. Russell's remarks naturally come to one's mind as one browses in the latest encyclopædia¹ which we owe to the indefatigable pen of Sir James G. Frazer. What a marvellous store of learning lies accumulated in these three stout volumes with their endless array of footnotes! Sir James, it appears, has read the Old Testament in the original Hebrew and can trace Ben Jonson's "Drink to me only with thine eyes" to its recondite Greek model. He seems to have harrowed the ethnographic literature of all languages with a fine-comb in search of apt illustrations. He even quotes Darwin and Huxley and Suess. Yet, withhold, there is a strangely musty odour about these tomes; they smell of the Middle Ages, of antiquarian industry, rather than of the spirit of modern research.

The long and the short of it is that Sir James is a scholar, but he is not a thinker. His reading is vast, and where a question requires mere knowledge and the use of elementary logic his equipment suffices, and may even produce eminently satisfactory results. For example, when the perusal of Genesis recalls to him countless primitive cosmogonies, he is quite capable of ranging them in the two fundamental categories of creation-stories and evolutionary stories. Better still, when he is confronted with the current notions about the *jus primae noctis*, he is able to rectify an inveterate popular fallacy by ample citation of evidence, and to prove conclusively that the privilege in question had nothing whatsoever to do with the feudal lord but related solely to the legal husband's right to dispense with the customary period of continence.

Further, it can not be denied that Sir James is in possession of only a rudimentary critical sense. When one school of extremists argues that all Deluge tales must have sprung from one source, and another is equally positive that they all arose independently, Sir James judiciously declines to accept *in toto* either of the rival theories and insists on judging each case on its merits. He is likewise unmoved by the far-fetched absurdities of German mythologists who interpret tales of a great flood as symbolic representations of astral events. But where the task is of a more complicated character, when the point at issue is a critical revision of accepted concepts, his positive qualities are inadequate. Happy and secure when he can follow the standards of an acknowledged leader—be he Maitland or Morgan or Robertson Smith—he flounders and stumbles when he is thrust guileless into the virgin forest of ethnographic fact or when his beacon lights turn into will-o'-the-wisps.

It is the intricacies of sociological phenomena that bring Sir James to grief and provide a measure for his intellectual limitations. He might, indeed, have derived some aid from the interpretations of his fellows, but he is curiously eclectic in the choice of theories he deigns to consider. True, he has answered the charge of neglecting recent interpretations in an earlier work: too much engrossed in the study of field reports, he can not spare time for the lucubrations of mere closet anthropologists. Such an attitude, consistently followed, would open vistas of heroic effort. Who does not long for the dauntless innovator who shall turn his back on the phrase-mongering of the learned and grapple anew with the chaos of raw fact? But, alas! that is not Sir James's way. For what profits it a man to ignore the teachings of his contemporaries if it is only to fall back on the discredited dogmas of an earlier age? To strike out completely for oneself is one thing; to ignore Professors Boas, Swanton and Goldenweiser while trudging in the footsteps of Lewis H. Morgan is quite another. Sir

James is the Bourbon of primitive sociology, forgetting nothing and learning nothing. New facts, of course, he absorbs and quotes with a copiousness of which only he is capable; but their meaning is predetermined for him by the pigeonholes he has had ready to receive them for twenty years past. The occasional references to novel points of view recall the German saying, *Er hat läuten hören, aber er weiß nicht wo*. Have customs been transmitted from one people to another? Can distinct conditions lead to like effects? Certainly, concedes Sir James, easing his conscience as a scholar and a gentleman by the cordiality of his welcome to the newcomers. It little occurs to him that the strangers are likely to send the edifice he inhabits tumbling about his ears.

No, whether he renders lip-service to the novel ideas or passes them over in dignified silence, Sir James Frazer has changed not a jot since he leapt into fame with "The Golden Bough," and into even greater fame with "Totemism and Exogamy." The hoary generalizations of Howitt and Morgan still supply the warp and woof of his own schemes. There is the old nonsensical assumption that some fine day in the past, Australian elders sat down on their haunches to excogitate a new social organization. There is a re-hash of the venerable fiction of group-marriage as a primitive institution. Once more Australia is paraded as the Mecca of all origin-hunters; as the one spot where given usages may be observed in their earliest forms.

Nothing, however, reveals the essential weakness of Sir James's mental equipment more glaringly than his treatment of primitive modes of designating relatives. The reviewer does not wantonly drag in this difficult topic just to confound an opponent; it is one which Sir James himself can not let alone, and on whose data he bases some of his most important conclusions. Yet in this subject, so vital to his philosophy of society, he has not advanced one inch beyond the point reached in 1871 in Morgan's "Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity"; nay, he has positively retrogressed. Even his craving for new facts seems to desert him in this field of inquiry; apparently it has not occurred to him that large areas in North America were never touched by Morgan, and that half a century of investigation has, in a measure, supplied the gaps. Morgan is to Sir James Frazer the last word on fact and the last word on theory.

This slothful acceptance of Morgan reaches its extreme in a reference to the Eskimo. For reasons of his own, Sir James wishes to prove that the Eskimos have a "classificatory" system. Happily for him, Morgan actually attributes such a terminology to the Eskimos and, accordingly, a reference to Morgan settles the point. In his zeal, however, he omits Morgan's rather significant qualification that the Eskimos lack the most important and fundamental features of the Iroquois system, that they have but two out of the ten essential characteristics. Sir James apparently does not know, what can be learned by a careful critical study of Morgan himself, that the vital issue is the merging of more remote kin with the direct line of descent, and that being without this essential the Eskimo nomenclature resembles our own more than that of the Iroquois. In this whole field, so important for his argumentation, Sir James's innocence is pathetic. It is safe to say that he has never expended a shred of independent thought on kinship systems, which shows that amazing erudition may go hand in hand with amazing shallowness.

Whence, then, Sir James's international fame? Why has he been lauded as the greatest of anthropologists? Why is a man who ranks neither as a field reporter nor as an original thinker cited by philosopher, historian and psychologist? The reasons are various. For one thing, Sir James writes beautiful English, though he is not in any sense a great writer. For that, with his diffuseness, iteration and over-citation, he lacks all sense of the architecture of composition. No great writer has such a positive terror of the strait and narrow way, none so constantly yields to the enticements of bypaths, retracing

¹ "Folk-Lore in the Old Testament." 3 volumes. Sir James George Frazer. New York: The Macmillan Company.

his steps only to explore some alluring alley. Nor can it be said that Sir James has a literary style in that highest sense in which the word is applied to a Heine or a Carlyle. But beautiful nevertheless is his diction, and his trick at polished metaphor will enthrall those who are responsive to the Alexandrine couplet.

But there is a deeper reason for Sir James Frazer's vogue, distinct from his form and rooted in the accidents of intellectual history. Sir James happens to be one of the rear-guards of post-Darwinian rationalism. To some, the biological arguments for evolution meant little, because the subject-matter lay too far beyond their interests. To them, the occurrence of savage rites and beliefs analogous to the mysteries of Christianity came as a shock and a revelation. Of course, there are two ways of looking at such parallels, and in "The Varieties of Religious Experience" there are some useful remarks on the danger of confounding a lowly origin with a low value in the sphere of beliefs. But, though lacking in stringency, the demonstration of, say, a communion ceremony among naked savages who practise witchcraft and eat human flesh loomed as a decisive argument against the higher significance of the rite; and when all allowances are made, the comparison remains illuminating. Thus, an appreciable contingent of Sir James's following is recruited from readers who owe to his earlier work their freedom from theological dogma.

Finally must be adduced the intrinsic attractiveness of the facts compiled in Sir James's books. There is something naturally fascinating about the oddities of primitive custom and folk-thought, and mere browsing in Sir James Frazer's handsome and well-written publications will gratify this legitimate interest.

Indeed, it is on his gathering of raw material that Sir James Frazer's service to science will ultimately be seen to rest, and as a useful, though humble, contribution it may be gratefully accepted. It is true that with all their comprehensiveness his surveys reveal noticeable gaps, especially as to New World data. It is also true that the mode of presentation at times obscures the full ethnographic significance of the material; and that on more abstruse topics, the slovenliness of Sir James's thinking may even lead to positive misrepresentation. Yet when everything is said and done, his industry has been far indeed from being futile. By rummaging some of the darkest archives of anthropological literature, he has brought to light much that would otherwise have remained inaccessible. A student setting out to explore such fields as forms of marriage, kinship-taboos, or laws of inheritance may well ignore Sir James Frazer's interpretations, but he will save time and effort if he takes for his starting-point the references amassed by Sir James's industry. In rearing the structure of scientific thought the mason has his legitimate place, but we must not confound him with the master-builder.

ROBERT H. LOWIE.

ORDER AND BRIGHTNESS.

It must have been with malice aforethought that Mr. Francis Hackett chose "The Invisible Censor" as the title essay in a book of collected articles from the *New Republic*. By the censor, he says, "I mean a secret creature of acute solicitude, who feels that social facts must be manicured and pedicured before they are fit to be seen. He constantly revises and blue-pencils the human legend" in the interest of edification.

He aims by no means to give us access to the facts. He aims not at all to let us judge for ourselves. With all his might he strives to relate facts under his supervision to the end that he thinks desirable. The evil of the censor is never illustrated in his rational subordination of impulses, but in those subordinations that violate human and social freedom. And the worst of them are the vague, the subtle subordinations that take away the opportunity of truth.

Here is the secret of the author's rebellion: his resentment at the veils which Mrs. Grundy wraps about beauty

¹"The Invisible Censor." Francis Hackett. New York: B. W. Huebsch.

and vitality, reminding one of the prudish draperies painted over the nude and virile figures of "The Last Judgment," his resentment no less at the veils of "archaic, irrational and ritualistic decorum" that interpose good form between us and our real interests as human beings. Sometimes when the veil is heavy and the interest vital, he pulls it away with firm but discriminating deliberation, being careful to make his readers a party to the act, and meticulously giving the censor-devil who put it there his due. His criticism of the accredited attitude towards Germany during the war opens with a direct, instinctive appreciation of the reasons for the fierce self-defensive nationalism that put the stamp of public approval upon such primitive patriotism, and then he shames what is irrational and uncivilized by exposing the deeper passion of Lincoln.

When Mr. Hackett writes of Ireland, he pierces behind the destructive and biting narrowness, the intolerances that our old tribal censor sanctions and applauds, the uncompromising belligerency that hides and falsifies every common interest and renders vain every "solution." He estimates the rebellion of Easter-week not by the accepted criterion of its imprudence and certainty of failure, but by the necessity animating its leaders to refuse an unjust and brutal authority.

It is not in vain, however, that these poets and Gaelic scholars and Republicans have stood blindfolded to be shot by English soldiers. Their verdict on English authority was scarcely in fault. They estimated with just contemptuousness the temper of a ruling-class whose yoke Ireland has long been compelled to endure. Until that yoke is gone from Ireland, by the fulfillment of England's bond, the memory of this rebellion must flourish. It testifies sadly but heroically that there are still Irishmen who can not be sold over the counter, Irishmen who set no ultimate sanction on a dishonest authority, Irishmen who set no ultimate value on their merely mortal lives.

Mr. Hackett, naturally, writes on Ireland with a fervour aroused by no other public question, but his essential poise of spirit survives the test; for although he engages in the mortal conflict, he can estimate the issues with the clarity of an onlooker.

Sometimes he puts by the orthodox attitudes with so deft an art and with so rich and aggressive a sympathy, that his achievement is too infectious to be noted, as when he depicts the feelings of the incapacitated and bullied blind man who was a strike-breaker, or when he searches the reasons why Gorky's "Night Lodging" is not a gloomy play: "It is the people who think too narrowly of poverty and failure who see 'Night Lodging' as depressing. It does not fail in beholding life. It is not poor in sympathy." Now and then the whisking of the veil is almost sheer mischief. When Okura sees Newport in order to view American democracy, his unscrupulous courier plays upon the cunning Oriental *naïveté* with no less suave and innocent a cunning, making the whole a broad mockery of the usual democratic assumption. The article on "Billy Sunday, Salesman" has a brisk impertinence, yet it is never smart at the expense of accuracy. On the contrary, the appraisal checks off both the inner man and his social accomplishment with light finality. The whole case is presented with a quick and fine economy, as druggists do up packages. Throughout the book one is constantly making such gay discoveries as these—delicious peeps behind the curtain upon a scene of sudden order and brightness.

GERTRUDE BESSE KING.

WRITING AS HISTORY AND AS STYLE.

The history of our alphabet and of other systems of writing historically connected or unconnected with it has been often told. Yet there is room for a new synthesis of the vast array of facts, something, say, that would bring the lay reader into touch with the later finds in the Mediterranean region and with the newer theories based on these finds. Even more welcome than a merely historical survey of the systems of writing as such would be a general review of their development from the stand-